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Six given awards for diversity in the Upstate

By E. Richard Walton
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John Simpkins, the keynoter for the Fourth Annual Upstate Diversity Leadership Awards Dinner, used the backdrop of the U.S presidential race as a springboard to talk Tuesday night about the growing diversity in the workplace.

He said that regardless of who becomes the next president, America's diversity will be highlighted.

If John McCain wins, he will be the oldest president when he takes office, and he is a former POW and a Vietnam veteran, he said. If either Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton wins, it will either be the first African American or first woman to serve in the White House, he said.

Simpkins, an assistant professor of law and director of diversity initiatives at the College of Charleston, said there is a variety of strengths when people and companies embrace diversity.

"In America, we're all about picking sides," he said. People need to "recognize the strength that comes" in differences.

Calder D. Ermann, speaking before an award named in his honor was given, said diversity has allowed the Upstate to tap into more of its people resources. "We've changed the landscape as we relate to race and gender issues," he said.

The six honored for their diversity included:

- Walgreens Anderson Distribution Center, which has exceeded a self-imposed goal of hiring 38 percent of its workforce having mental or physical handicaps, received the "outstanding business award."
- The Hispanic-American Women's Association, which has 77 members and has worked hard to bridge gaps between Hispanics and Upstate residents. The award for Outstanding Contribution for International Diversity went to AHAM.
- Harry B. Shucker, a vice president of student services at Furman University, received the "Calder D. Ehrmann Outstanding Individual Award." He's been heading student services for 22 years, said Baxter Wynn, master of ceremonies.
- Ladarius Thompson, a student at the USC Upstate campus, received the outstanding college student award.
- Damaris Taylor, a senior at Greenville High School Academy, earned the outstanding high school student award.
- Triune Mercy Center was presented the outstanding non-profit organization award.

Organizers have said that the three co-sponsors of the event have generated unexpected benefits. They include the chambers of commerce for Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg.

The chambers co-sponsored the ceremony with Furman University's Riley Institute, which has been training executives how to better handle diversity in the workplace for six years.

About 500 people attended the cocktail hour, dinner and awards ceremony at the Carolina First Center.
